

## Chapter 4

# Meal Service



In this unit you will learn how to count meals that qualify for reimbursement and kinds of meal service appropriate in an RCCI. Some suggestions for getting children to make better food choices are provided, along with ideas for special occasion meals.

Meals nourish only if children eat them. The factors that encourage children to eat are food that looks and tastes good and mealtime that is fun. Facilities that serve nutritious food and age-appropriate serving sizes in a pleasant atmosphere have done their part.

The child's part is to decide how much to eat—or whether to eat at all.

There are times when children eat very little, sometimes for days at a time. Children grow in spurts. When they are not growing, they are not very hungry. When they are growing, they will get

hungry. Children in good general health will eat when they are hungry to meet growth needs. Some children may need to be reassured that food will be served every day and they will get enough to meet their needs.

Activity also plays a part in appetite, and so does mood. Children will eat if they are hungry and the food is appetizing. If an RCCI has residents who have patterns of negative food behavior or eating disorders, expert professional help is needed.

Many children reject new foods, and some residents may not have been exposed to the kinds of foods served in the RCCI. Ways to get around the childhood new-food phobia:

- ★ Prepare only a small amount, so each child has just a taste.
- ★ Keep serving the food until it is not new any more.
- ★ Get leaders in the

group to help prepare and introduce their new food creation at meal time.

- ★ Make the new food a choice; give it at least a three-time trial.
- ★ Be sure the new food looks appetizing. People eat first with their eyes.

Food is for eating, and any attempt to use food to modify behavior can have long-term harmful effects on attitudes toward mealtime. Withholding food for punishment is against regulations; nourishment cannot be denied. Using food for rewards—to modify behavior—is just as inappropriate.

## Accountability

Because an RCCI receives federal funds, the menus must meet all the requirements for federal reimbursement (see Program Requirements and Regulations, page 6-1, for specifics).

Chapter One discussed SMI and OVS regulations for the four different kinds of menu systems.

You must attend to the record-keeping chores that assure accountability when the meal is actually served. Counts may not be taken from attendance records.

- ☛ Count meals at the point-of-service.
- ☛ Only reimbursable meals served to children may be counted.
- ☛ Use production records to document that foods served meet federal meal patterns.
- ☛ Document correct implementation of Offer versus Serve.

### **Types of Meal Service**

Residential child care institutions have an nutritional edge over school food service because the RCCI has no food service competition. The residents do not eat off campus or from vending machines. This makes it much easier to give children a good start, a well-rounded food intake that plants the

seeds of lifelong good eating patterns.

The RCCI can serve meals pre-plated, family-style, or buffet style. Pre-plated means that the correct serving sizes of all food items are placed on the plate by the RCCI. Pre-plated meal service is fast and gives the RCCI control. The down side is that pre-plated meals take choice and responsibility away from children.

Family style meal service is having all food items put into serving bowls and brought to the table. Two styles of family-style meal service adapt well to Offer versus Serve meals. With traditional family-style service, the adult in charge at the head of the table serves the entree. The server may ask each person to express a preference or serve age-appropriate serving sizes. The server may pass each plate to the adult at the foot of the table, who serves side dishes, or pass each plate to the person being served and then pass the side dishes around for all to help themselves.

In the more informal

family-style service, plates are set at each place setting, and residents help themselves. This informal service gives more opportunities to provide verbal guidance in making healthy food choices.

When most of the children are on the healthy-food bandwagon, a new resident or a negative child is bound to come around.

Buffet style is having all foods put on a sideboard or side table. Children fill their plates before taking their seats at the dining table.

### **Mealtime Climate**

A warm, harmonious atmosphere around the table is a terrific incentive to show up for meals and behave at the table. A child whose behavior is disruptive may be sent away from the table, but the child must have the meal. Houseparents can encourage children to try each dish and set healthy examples.

Consider the child's viewpoint. Everyone is entitled to food preferences—yes, even dislikes. Children can

understand that it is okay to decline foods they do not like as long as they choose other foods that make up a varied and balanced meal.

### **Food Choices**

The more foods children have to choose from, the more likely children will get balanced meals and foods that best meet their specific needs. Of course, the RCCI has to balance the number of choices offered with time available for food preparation. These are some of the ways to maximize choices in minimum time.

- ☺ Offer several salad dressings, including low-fat dressings for children who want to control weight. Explain the difference to all children, not just those who are overweight. After all, most Americans battle the bulge at some time during their lifetime.
- ☺ Offer the same food prepared two ways, such as chicken baked with stuffing or chicken baked in

barbecue sauce; baked potatoes or oven-baked fries. This is a good way to begin education about calories and fat grams.

- ☺ Grill two kinds of foods and give children their choice: hot dogs or boneless chicken breast; grilled tomatoes or baked onion.
- ☺ Allow children to make their own sandwiches from a choice of breads and several fillings.
- ☺ Serve the same fruits and vegetables raw and cooked: raw carrot strips or steamed julienne carrots, fresh apple slices or sauteed apple rings.
- ☺ Offer fresh fruit choices: apple or orange, banana or grapes.

Improving healthy eating patterns requires creativity. One way is to use favorite foods to introduce better foods.

Following are some examples.

- ☞ Prepare mixed dishes with favorite foods dominating over less favorite foods: mixed vegetable that has more corn or beans and less

cauliflower and  
broccoli; mixed salad  
that is primarily  
iceberg lettuce with a  
little fresh spinach, red  
cabbage, or raw  
squash.

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- ☞ Increase the fiber in sandwiches by making them with one slice of white bread and one slice of wheat bread in the beginning. Then try two slices of whole-wheat bread. Make whole-wheat extra attractive with triangle cuts, pickle garnishes, and crisp lettuce leaves.
- ☞ Mix a little brown rice in with the regular white rice. Gradually increase proportions.
- ☞ Use a crinkle cutter to prepare carrots, squash and cucumber slices.
- ☞ Cut fresh fruit so it is easy to eat—oranges into wedge “smiles,” apples and pears into slices or rings, melons into cubes or balls, or make mixed fruit salad.

## Special Occasion Meals

A weekend backyard cookout is a treat for children and an opportunity to improve their eating patterns. Grilling is one of the best ways to prepare low-fat meats. Vegetables with special seasonings and smoky flavor appeal to almost everyone. Take fullest advantage of the grill to prepare the whole meal. It is not just for cooking hamburgers any more.

Kabobs, for example, are favorites with children. Meat, fish, or poultry cubes skewered with peppers, onions, tomatoes, and fresh mushrooms work vegetables into the meal with no complaints. Meats can be lean red meat, cubed and marinated, chunks of chicken or turkey, fish filets, shrimp, or ham cubes. Vegetable kabobs can include squash slices and eggplant. Fruit kabobs are great on the grill for dessert or for breakfast: wrap chunks of pineapple in thin slices of Canadian bacon or lean ham, thread on skewers with onion

and peppers, and grill. Any of these

kabobs will work under the broiler, too, in case it rains.

Vegetables wrapped in foil that lend themselves to grilling include potatoes, sweet potatoes, onion, tomatoes, eggplant, carrots, and corn-on-the-cob.

### Camping Out

Camping promotes bonding as few activities can, what with shared new experiences, physical closeness, and mutual responsibility for each other. Camping introduces children to the great outdoors, gets them into an active lifestyle, and offers opportunities for new sports—hunting, fishing, study of flora and fauna.

Camping opens the opportunity to cook three meals a day on the grill. With careful menu planning, it is just as possible to produce meals that qualify for reimbursement on the grill

and camp stove as it is at home. These days so many shelf-stable convenience foods are available. Ultra High Temperature pasteurization (UHT) milk, for example, is fresh milk that needs no refrigeration until opened.

### Picnics

Eating outdoors stimulates appetites. Fun and games naturally fit with picnics, and change-of-pace makes children happy. Outings are a great way to celebrate birthdays with less mess to clean up afterwards. Children play hard, eat well, and come home happy.

If all of the above are not reasons enough to plan picnics, here is one more: cookouts and picnics suggest opportunities to get children involved in food preparation. They will be enthusiastic about helping with the special occasion, and advance preparations enhance anticipation.

In addition to birthday parties, theme picnics are

great ways to make children happy. Easter, for example, lends itself to an egg hunt. Think of the group dynamics: everybody colors eggs, the big kids hide them, and the little kids find them. Then everybody has colored hard-cooked eggs (not the ones played with) and hot-cross buns for breakfast. Instead of the sweet treats, make bunnies with a pear half in a bed of shredded lettuce. Put a miniature marshmallow on one end for the tail. Stick almond halves in the other end for ears, and use raisins for eyes and nose.

### **Cultural Meals**

Meals that feature the foods of children's cultural heritage are another way, and one of the most productive ways, to get the kids involved with food preparation and nutrition. Cultural foods help the whole group develop sensitivity to ethnic diversity. A meal with music, native dress, typical games and activities honors children of different cultures and teaches all children what

is good about other cultures.

The RCCI may have residents from cultures with characteristic cuisine: Native American, Italian, Jewish, Haitian, Oriental, East Indian, Greek, Mexican, Cuban or Puerto Rican. To develop menus for their special cultural observances, get cookbooks that provide appropriate recipes. Timing to coincide with holidays of other cultures is especially fitting; for example, African American Kwanza or Jewish Rosh Hashana and Hanukkah.

Certain religions practice special dietary restrictions, notably Orthodox Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Seventh Day Adventist. Children of these faiths provide an opportunity—by example—to teach children to respect the rights and wishes of others. Explain the rationale and advantages of the dietary practices as they are observed. For example, the vegetarian diet of a Seventh Day Adventist or Hindu is a low-fat pattern that promotes healthy hearts and lowers risk of cancer

and obesity. Children can learn about meat alternates and how to balance legumes and grains to make a complete protein.

Vegetarian meals will be fun meals for children, with cheese pizza, eggs, beans, peanut butter, and cheese. When vegetarian residents are among the children in the RCCI, provide meat alternates at all meals, and plan one day a week for all residents to eat vegetarian.

### **Typical vegetarian lunches:**

Cheese pizza, green salad, fruit, milk

Grilled cheese sandwiches, vegetable soup, crackers, bean salad, apple cobbler, milk

Bean burrito, Spanish rice, Mexicali corn, fruit, milk

Red beans and rice (meatless for vegetarians), salad greens, sliced tomatoes, melon cubes, milk

Strict vegetarians, who consume a vegan diet that contains no animal foods

of any kind, require supplements and special meals. Most RCCIs will need help from a registered dietitian to plan vegan diets.

## Events

Eating out is a special treat for everyone. The easiest way to handle the issue of reimbursable meals in a restaurant is to avoid it. Eat the evening meal out instead of breakfast or lunch.

## Meeting the Needs of Special Children

Child nutrition programs are required to meet the needs of children who are on special diets. Special dietary needs are those where the condition has been confirmed and the diet prescribed by a recognized medical authority.



Interpreting the pre

scribed diet and adapting menus to meet the needs of the child is the business of the profession called dietetics. A professional, registered dietitian (R.D.) can help. Find an R.D. through the local health department, hospital, the American Dietetic Association, 1-800-877-1600. Contact your State Agency for additional resources for working with children with special needs.

